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Andrea Castañeda, Superintendent

November 5, 2025

Dear Salem-Keizer Community,

We are a seven-member school board, and each of us has different backgrounds and perspectives. While our beliefs may sometimes differ, we are unified by our shared commitment to the students, staff, and schools of Salem-Keizer. Today we share a challenge and our confidence that we, as a staff and community, will overcome it.

Oregon's economy is faltering. And because the majority of Salem-Keizer's funding comes from the state, that means our funding is wavering too. We are acting now based on what we know now to protect our financial future. We are announcing three actions to protect our district's financial health and our schools' ability to continue focusing on teaching and learning.

Action One: Salem-Keizer Public Schools will begin identifying \$25 million in reductions from next year's budget. This reduction protects our long-term stability, which is necessary regardless of whether the state economy continues to weaken. Salem-Keizer's \$25 million reductions will begin with district operating expenses, with the goal of shielding schools and classrooms from immediate impact.

Action Two: We will continue to keep **students at the center**. Our financial reductions must prioritize the conditions that support teaching and learning. We will **protect instructional time**. Oregon already has one of the shortest school years in the nation, so we must find ways to trim our budget without trimming instructional days. And we will **continue to be transparent**, openly sharing reduction options and decisions.

Action Three: Salem-Keizer's salary and benefit costs are increasing by 9% annually—roughly \$50 million each year. This year, 95% of our district's general operating fund is now budgeted to cover staffing, leaving no path to reduce spending without reducing staffing costs. In the coming weeks or months, we will start conversations with our labor partners about the likely difficult choice between future cost-of-living rate increases and staff reductions. We are deeply aware that both options are harmful to our staff and schools.

We ask people to pay attention to the news on November 19 when the State of Oregon will share new information about Oregon's economic health. Based on that information, the State will decide about recommended mid-year reductions to school district budgets.

We are board members who love and care about Salem-Keizer's children, families, staff, and schools. We are also members of your community. Our children attend school with your children. We see you at ball games, various school activities and performances, and at the grocery store. And right now, we are leading our school district through complex challenges with few easy answers. We hope you will join us in building the best solutions together.

Cynthia Richardson, Board Chair, Zone 2

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